

I just need you to know how I feel, even if it means I could lose you by **TheMikeWheelers (jasongracefully)**

Category: Stranger Things (TV 2016)

Genre: F/M, staring contest

Language: English

Characters: Eleven (Stranger Things), Mike Wheeler

Relationships: Eleven & Mike Wheeler, Eleven/Mike Wheeler

Status: Completed

Published: 2017-06-03

Updated: 2017-06-03

Packaged: 2022-04-02 00:34:00

Rating: General Audiences

Warnings: No Archive Warnings Apply

Chapters: 1

Words: 1,828

Publisher: archiveofourown.org

Summary:

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Mike's squinted eyes focused on El, like he was assessing every movement she made. El swore he could see right through her, and that he was directly peering into her mind to uncover every secret and feeling she was hiding from him.

She narrowed her eyes and peered back at him, determined not to let anything slip. *Don't focus on Mike, just focus on the contest. Think about winning.*

Holly had been begging Eleven to have staring contests with her all day, and when Mike got home from school and she told him about it, he gave out a chuckle and insisted *he* was the best when it came to staring contests against Holly. Eleven smirked, raising her eyebrows in doubt, and Mike continued that if she didn't believe him, then she should try and win against him.

Her shoulders tensed up as she looked at him, but El tried to will herself to just stare vacantly back at him, not to think about how it was *Mike's* eyes she found herself getting lost in.

She analyzed every part of his eyes as she stared ahead: The way his eyebrows furrowed together as he stared at her, the small bags growing under his eyes from staying up later and later each night, and the way a single eyelash had come loose, about to fall into his eye if he didn't rub it away.

Their faces gradually moved closer together, and El felt herself heat up. Mike noticed as well, she knew from the way his entire face turned a shade of pink that had recently become her favorite color. Even with the seriousness he was taking this contest, Mike's dancing eyes still gleamed, and El couldn't bring herself to look away.

The gleam in his eye seemed to shine brighter every time she focused on it, and it was blinding. It was the sun on a summer day, the way it lit up everything around her, but she feared if she looked at it directly, it would blind her. It was a star, El was sure of that, because she knew his eyes held their own whole universes inside them.

Flecks of amber and gold floated in chocolate brown, dancing in his irises like playful sparks jumping from a fireplace as they called for attention and adventure. It made El wonder of all the fire Mike held inside himself.

And how much she'd love for it to warm her up.

Eleven pulled back, she couldn't let herself think like that. Especially not now, with Mike's face just inches from hers, she couldn't let her mind drift into her feelings for the boy before her.

Things with Mike confused her. El was sure of her own feelings, the butterflies that erupted inside her every time she saw him made that perfectly clear, but she wondered how he felt. The way he blushed around her suggested he felt the same, and sometimes she swore the way he was talking was what Nancy had told her was called "flirting." But still, El was never the best at social cues, and she was terrified of messing this up.

El tried to force her mind to push it away for now, to just keep on with the contest and to make this a problem for later, but she couldn't keep looking at Mike's welcoming eyes without getting lost in their warmth.

She knew she should tell him how she felt, that it was the only way to calm the nervous flame growing inside her, but she was worried that the same flame would turn into blazing terror if she tried to confess to him.

Eleven found herself thinking back to when Mike had kissed her in the cafeteria all that time ago. She didn't know much about relationships, but it really did seem like every sign pointed towards Mike feeling the same way, so why was she still so terrified?

She didn't want to wreck their friendship, Mike had been there for her more than anyone else had. He knew her like no one else, and if he didn't feel the same way, she didn't want to live without him, even as a friend. They were friends now, and she was happy. Was she really considering risking her friendship with the one person who made her heart fill with love and made the sun shine brighter?

It was ridiculous, she shouldn't take that kind of risk. If Mike really felt the same way, he would make a move himself. He could kiss her, or ask her out, or do anything to show his feelings were the same.

El didn't want the responsibility of making a move, this all terrified her enough. So she pushed it off herself, if Mike really felt like this for her, then it was up to him.

But with that, El wondered *why* Mike hadn't done anything yet. She was terrified, but she was still so sure her feelings were requited. He showed every sign of liking her, so why didn't he do anything?

El tried to push this thought away, to focus back on Mike's eyes. They seemed to be vacant. His eyes were fixed on her, but he no longer seemed to be watching her, his energy wasn't at all focused on anything he saw.

She watched the empty eyes of the boy she loved, wondering what could be going through his mind. Was he thinking any of the same things as her? Then, El felt all the fears and concerns she held inside herself slip out in a single sentence, flying out for the world to shoot down or save, to do whatever it wanted with them. They were no longer in her mind, or her control.

"Why haven't you kissed me yet?"

Oh no, that wasn't how it was meant to come out. Her mind was screaming at her, questioning and demanding to know why she said that. She spent all this time scared about confessing her feelings to Mike, and now she just dumped them out there, no thought put into it.

Mike was snapped back into reality, completely forgetting about the contest. He pulled his face away, blushing even more than before, "W- What did you say?" He continued to stammer, but ultimately realized there was nothing he could say, stopping himself to look at El.

Eleven couldn't remember ever feeling more humiliated than she did in that moment. She wanted to run out of the basement and go home, to cover her face with a blanket and never have to deal with the

embarrassment of talking to Mike again. How could she just let it slip so casually? She spent all this time worrying about what would happen, and now she had no choice but to face that she had just ruined everything. With her face down, all she wanted was to take some attention off her slip-up.

“You blinked,” She murmured.

“I- I did.” He stuttered back, a disbelieving look on his face that El knew was not about whether or not he had blinked.

Mike looked like he wanted to say something to her, but he held his tongue. El was partially grateful for that, because she didn't want to deal with having to talk through what she had said, but on the other hand, the awkward silence was unbearable.

“Do you want to play again?” Mike spoke up suddenly, “I bet I could win this time.”

El looked back up, meeting his eyes once again and wishing she hadn't. She didn't want to play again, she wanted to run away and never have to look Mike in his eyes ever again, but if this was Mike's attempt to dispel the awkwardness in the room, she was thankful for him trying.

She nodded her head slowly and shut her eyes, preparing herself to have to open them and look at him again. One breath, then two, then she snapped her eyes open.

This game was different. El wasn't getting lost in Mike's eyes, she didn't *want* to think about them now. The contest was just something she had to get through. Meanwhile Mike wasn't looking on with his normal determination. El could have sworn that the expression he did wear was pure, unfiltered fear. He didn't blink, but his eyes shifted around her face, and his fingers were tapping wildly on his leg. El knew he was thinking too much about something, his ability to overthink was always something that hurt him. She just hated that she was the one who put him in this position.

Once again, their faces got closer together, but El knew she absolutely wasn't moving towards him this time. It must have been

all him, though she couldn't understand why. Her face was flushing, and she settled on staring at the spot between Mike's eyebrows and clearing her mind of all thoughts until this contest was over.

Beads of sweat formed at Mike's temples, but he ignored them, his mind telling him to get over himself. He had to focus on this, he didn't have a choice to put it off anymore, not after what El had said.

Eleven's thoughts spaced away from the contest, so she didn't even notice when Mike's face came rushing towards hers. It wasn't until she felt the way his lips slammed onto hers that she jolted out of her thoughts, kissing him back like it was all she could do.

The kiss lasted just a second, but in that single moment, all the glass around them shattered. The jar that held all the butterflies inside El had broken, and they were flying wildly all around her. The kiss said more than any words ever could, and when they pulled away, El wasn't sure how any words could follow that.

Her lips were slightly parted, and she had no idea what to do with her face. Mike looked away, his blush highlighting his freckles as he rubbed the back of his neck.

Mike's eyes met hers, and El saw those flecks of fire in his irises blazing. She felt her own fire inside her burn up, engulfing her in the flames.

They both had all this fire inside them, but their flames never caused any burns. These blazes didn't devour forests or houses or hurt anyone. These sparks were hearth, they were kindling campfires, they were bonfires bringing warmth to all.

And all they wanted to do was breath in one another's smoke.

El had no idea what she could say, but Mike had spoken up before she could worry about it. He met her eyes and grinned, "You blinked."

El watched as his eyes lit up, and felt her own smirk tugging at her lips, "So did you."

They didn't say anything, just grinning at one another, perfectly

content with their contest ending in a tie.

Though, they both would have argued that it was more of a mutual-victory.